

Lesson 30

Setting Healthy Boundaries

While much of coaching is about erasing limits, some of coaching is about drawing lines. This skill applies to (1) your client setting healthy boundaries in his life and (2) you setting healthy boundaries in your coaching practice. You will also benefit from setting healthy boundaries in your personal life, the success of which will bolster your coaching results.

Areas in which Clients Often Need to Set Boundaries:

1. Work

Stopping work at a reasonable time; not taking work home; not working on evenings, weekends, and holidays. Saying “no” to requests from supervisors or peers to do more than reasonable amounts of work. Client needs to move toward a healthier work/life balance, creating space for relaxation, renewal, play, and quality time for spouse and/or family.

2. Personal Relationships

Being with friends and family members by choice, not default, guilt, fear, or burdensome obligation. Creating distance from needy, critical, or negative people. Setting limits on draining or non-productive conversations.

3. Personal Space

Establishing a physical space in the home, or a retreat space, or a place to go outdoors for relaxation, reflection, and renewal. Detaching from spaces replete with the energy, intentions, or personal items of others.

4. Time

Making healthier use of time so the client is involved in activities by choice rather than default or acceding to the demands of others. Showing up on agreed-upon times for meetings and appointments. Creating sufficient buffer time so client does not have run-on appointments or arrive frazzled or harried.

5. Money

Managing money in a wise and mature fashion. Not creating unhealthy debts. Saying “no” to requests from others who are unduly needy or burdensome or who would do better to be independent.

6. Romance

Not giving one’s power away to a partner; staying whole, grounded, and self-sourcing rather than allowing romantic dramas to consume energy and distract oneself from inner peace, joy, and effectiveness

7. Sex

Choosing sexual relationships and interactions so the experience is joyful, empowering, and based on integrity.

8. Addictions

Facing, acknowledging, and managing addictions such as alcohol, drugs, shopping, work, computer, television, or any other non-productive compulsive behavior.

9. Critical or Negative Thinking

Becoming aware of self-defeating attitudes or patterns of thought and learning to curb them or channel energy to more positive, empowering attitudes and patterns. Create a meditation, affirmation, or similar practice to find more inner peace.

Areas in which to Set Healthy Boundaries in Your Coaching Practice:

1. Time

Begin and end your sessions on time, and ask your client to do the same. Beware of habitual lateness or rescheduling. Establish a policy that cancellations within a short period preceding the appointment may be subject to a fee. You can make exceptions where appropriate, but if someone is not complying with your policy a stated boundary will help.

2. Money

Be clear on your fee and stick to it. In the early stages of your practice you can be more flexible, as you also can with people who truly require financial assistance. Yet in general it will serve you and your clients to have them pay upon receipt of services.

3. Undue Neediness

Beware of clients who phone you or ask for your attention beyond your comfort level or a point that is truly helpful to them. While it may seem attractive that you are important to your client, your primary purpose is to empower the client to be self-sourcing. You might want to use a telephone number other than your home or cell for your clients, and give your clients your professional number only. Do the same with email.

If a client displays undue neediness, encourage her directly to find within herself the answers to her questions or issues, since this will strengthen her more than turning to you on a regular basis. You also have your private life you would like the client to respect. You can also simply not return all of her calls or emails as a statement that your availability is limited.

4. Emotional Involvement

Yes, you are a kind, sensitive, caring, and compassionate coach. No, you cannot afford to emotionally take on your clients' problems to the point that you feel upset or disturbed during your non-coaching hours.

Help your clients as much as you can, but do your best to leave your clients' issues behind after you get off the phone with them. You can, of course, think about your conversation and consider ways to support your clients, and send them loving energy, prayer, and intention. But don't allow their upsets to penetrate your own joy field.

Holding your joy space while they are prone to upset will be more empowering to them than joining them in upset.

5. Confidentiality

Your clients' statements and material are sacred to your relationship with him, and should never be discussed with another person, except perhaps for professional purposes, focusing more on the principle or dynamic than the individual person.

6. Sex and Romance

Don't go there. While attractions may sometimes occur and they may be tempting, do not allow sexual or romantic feelings to interfere with your coaching relationship. If your client tells you that he or she has such feelings for you, you can discuss them in the context of illuminating the issues you might help them understand or progress with.

7. Business Deals

It's generally not a good idea to get involved in business deals with your clients. Anything that might blur the lines of the coaching relationship and distract you from seeing each other clearly should be avoided.

As you can see, healthy boundary setting creates a powerful foundation for personal growth and coaching success. Be open and willing to point out boundary issues to your client and, even more important, master them yourself, personally, and in your coaching practice.

Exercise:

1. Of the boundary issues listed above, which do you have difficulty with, or do you think you might have difficulty with in your coaching practice?

2. What can you do to firm up your boundaries in such area(s)?

3. What boundaries other than in coaching do you have difficulty with?

4. How could you firm them up?

5. Fill in the chart below with your own answers or those for clients (examples given):

"No" to this:

Means A "Yes" to this:

1. Working late	More time to relax and/or be with family
2. Dating people you are not attracted to	Making space for people you are attracted to
3. Drama in relationships	Clarity and peace of mind in or out of a relationship
4.	
5.	
6.	

Affirm:

**I set and practice healthy and appropriate boundaries
that empower my clients and me
to focus our energy to create productive results and experiences.**

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